British Waterways London

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TOURISM AFLOAT

WATERWAY NEWS FOR TOURISM OPERATORS

GOING FOR GOLD - THE OLYMPIC WATERWAYS

London's bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games has thrust the Lower Lea Valley and its unique network of waterways into the limelight as never before. Wedged between Newham and Hackney, this little known corner of east London has for many years been seen as a dumping ground - both metaphorically and literally. The Olympic Bid has changed all that and begun to open people's eyes to the possibilities of the area.

Nowhere is this more apparent than with the Bow Back Rivers, a once forgotten network of derelict waterways that threads its way between Stratford and Bow. The revival of these rivers has long been a dream of British Waterways and waterway enthusiasts, and British Waterways has been working for some time with partners such as Lea Rivers Trust to open up access to the towpaths and improve wildlife habitats on the waterways. More recently it has upgraded Bow Locks, to reduce siltation of the navigation, dredged the 'Bow Back Loop' to allow navigation on the non-tidal rivers and regenerated the Limehouse Cut to improve the southern gateway to the area.

London's Olympic Bid has accelerated these restoration plans. This summer British Waterways, with support from Bellway Homes, will be installing new lock gates at City Mill Lock and has been working with Leaside Regeneration and the River Lea Tidal Mill Trust on plans to generate hydro-electricity from the Grade1 listed House Mill. The Olympic 'masterplans' have been crucial in underlining the waterways' importance to the area's regeneration and their role as a legacy for future generations.

Central to British Waterways' work is the goal of restoring the waterways for navigation, both for commercial traffic - moving construction materials and waste off the roads and onto the water - and for leisure boating, bringing tourism to the area for the first time. This is not the first time this has been suggested. On 18 March 1933 the Stratford Express predicted that: "West Ham will be a fashionable boating centre. You will see the elite in blazers and straw hats, pulling their skiffs up and down and having a glorious time. Who knows? There may be motorboat racing and Henley will have to look to its laurels in the matter of regattas."

Old ideas are quite often the best ideas.

VISITOR RESEARCH

During 2004, independent contractors undertook British Waterways' annual towpath survey in a bid to understand visitors to the waterside. The results of the research, carried out among towpath, and boating visitors, indicate that overall enjoyment of the waterways has not changed signifcantly since 2003, with 40% of visitors giving an excellent rating and less than 1% responding negatively. In 2004, 73% of visitors surveyed claimed they would definitely recommend the site they had visited and 70% would recommend boating holidays to others. For a copy of the full London report, published in May 2005 please contact Nerissa Bryden on nerissa.bryden@britishwaterways.co.uk.

INDUSTRY COMMENT

David Batley of the Canal Boat Project in Harlow talks to Rebecca Richardson about how a community boat project can offer a viable business proposition as well as improving the lives of the hundreds of people that use them.

The first thing you notice when you visit the Canal Boat Project is the enthusiasm of the crew. As volunteers, the crew are committed to offering river based experiences to people with disibilities and after 14 years are still as passionate about the value of their work. Specially adapted boats cater for all types of disability, wheelchair users are given the opportunity to steer from a seated position and visually impaired customers benefit from unique tiller operation.

Batley explains, “After nine years of painstaking fundraising we successfully launched the *Stort Challenger*. Five years on we have three additional boats in the fleet. By using the experience and dedication of everyone at the Project we have created a successful charitable business working to improve the lives of disabled and disadvantaged people by removing the restrictions they usually face when trying to pursue this type of activity"

Keeping the Project financially viable is a difficult business and one that the staff are all too familiar with. As with all small charitable businesses, raising funds is a constant struggle but those at the Project are in no doubt that it's necessary.

"Everyone who works here does so because they believe in what the Project does. Not everyone is paid for their services but their commitment is equal regardless. Essentially, we want to make a difference and we believe we are adding value to people's lives whether it's by giving them an experience they've never had or offering them expert training and boat hire at fantastic prices"

There is no doubt that the staff at the Canal Boat Project are commited individuals and their knowledge of the river and the surrounding areas are second to none. With summer just around the corner, there's never been a better time for messing about on the river.

For more information on The Canal Boat Project, hiring a boat or even volunteering please contact www.canalboat.org.uk email admin@canalboat.org.uk or telephone 0870 414 424.

LEAFLET UPDATE

Following the success of the new look leisure leaflets in 2004, British Waterways London have published a new edition of *London's Secret* for 2005. With new consumer offers supplied by waterside businesses, this edition presents a more compelling reason for people to visit the waterways this summer.

If you would like to provide a special offer or competition prize to help us promote your business in future editions please contact nerissa.bryden@britishwaterways.co.uk for further details.

In recent years walking has become the nation's lesiure pursuit of choice. As a result, British Waterways London is publishing seven walking leaflets for the London region. Researched routes and specially commissioned maps have been designed in a bid to encourage people to use the towpaths for their walk. The guides cover urban and rural areas in London and the surrounding areas and will be available in May by telephoning 020 7985 7200.

BUSINESS REPORTS GROWTH

Business on Britain's inland waterways is thriving. Boat ownership has been increasing steadily for a number of years and now it seems that spend on waterborne leisure activities, including holidays afloat, are also rising. Spending increases of 6-8% per annum are opening up a number of opportunities for waterside businesses. With more people spending their leisure time and money along Britain's inland waterways, new and increased markets are opening to businesses looking to develop their product further. Research suggests that this growth is attributed to a number of factors including an increase in disposable income and the increasing investment and enhancement of the inland waterway environment.

CAMDEN GETS A FACELIFT

British Waterways London and the London Borough of Camden have carried out a range of projects along the Regent's Canal to improve community safety and to make Camden more visitor friendly.

A massive graffiti cleaning excersise was successfully completed by the environmental charity, Thames 21, between Cumberland Basin in the west and the Constitution Pub on St. Pancras Way in the east. New directional signage has been installed allowing canal users to make the most of their visit to the area and towpath planting schemes have been carried out to improve the environment.

In a bid to discourage anti-social behaviour, hidden corners have been designed out by new railings, CCTV has been introduced and a pilot scheme for Street Wardens is being jointly funded by BWL and LBC to carry out regular patrols of the towpath. For further information on the project in Camden please contact mark.blackwell@britishwaterways.co.uk

FILMING ON THE WATERWAYS

London's waterways are proving to be an exciting backdrop for film makers. News from location managers is that filming enquiries are floading in now the weather has improved. The capital's rivers and canals are inspiring storylines from music videos to big movie makers. Rumour has it that the sequal to a huge Hollywood blockbuster is being filmed in the capital and filming along London's Waterways is expected to form part of the storyline. Watch this space….

ENJOY THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Urban Escapes is capturing everyone's imagination this year. Billed as the outdoor show in the outdoors, this event is being held at Lee Valley Park, Waltham Abbey between 17th and 19th June. Aimed at anyone who wants to try something new or go somewhere different, the event will provide a place to try canoeing, kayaking, dragon boat racing & river boat trips and the Flood Relief Channel will provide a tranquil location for those wanting to try fishing.

The showground will have opportunities to try rock climbing, mountain biking, guided walks and skateboarding. There will be children's entertainment, food and drink and some excellent retail stalls so Urban Escapes promises a great day out for all the family.

If your business would like to exhibit at this event please contact TJW Events on 01823 250930 or visit **www.urban-escapes.co.uk** For tickets to the event please contact the ticket hotline on 0870 060 1754.

SCIENCE WEEK VISITS THE CANAL

Over 450 school children spent a day on London's canals in March as part of National Science Week. Elaine Stanley, British Waterways London's learning services officer, organised two weeks of activities providing the children with a unique and enjoyable learning experience. The first week was spent at Hillingdon Canal Club on the Grand Union Canal in Uxbridge with boat trips provided by Hillingdon Narrowboats Association.

The second was based at the London Canal Museum on the Regent's Canal with boat trips provided by Islington Narrowboat Association and Laburnum Boat Club.

As well as enjoying a boat trip, the children also took part in different workshops. They learnt about the canal as a wildlife habitat, how tunnels are built and how boats float. One teacher commented, 'It was a wonderful day. The children learnt a lot and had a great deal of fun.'

INDUSTRY COMMENT

Launched nationally in 2001, VAQAS is a consumer focused quality assessment service for visitor attractions and is managed by Visit Britain. VAQAS aims to identify the strengths and areas for development of an attraction and has already serviced a wide range of attractions throughout England.
Instead of grading attractions, VAQAS assesses each on its own merits using objective quality benchmarks, provided by the industry. All areas that impact on the quality of the visitor experience are included in the assessment, ranging from the enquiry through to the departure. The assessment recognises areas that may be unique as well as common areas and where an attraction does not have a particular facility, such as a car park or catering, those aspects are excluded.

Attractions who participate in VAQAS benefit from the use of the quality marque, VisitBritain's national quality marque, with the accreditation 'Quality Assured Visitor Attraction', offering reassurance to visitors that an attraction meets quality standards. Artwork and posters can be provided for use on literature and on site and a large version of the VAQAS plaque is available for presentations and photo shoots. Businesses also receive an enhanced national and international promotion on the official tourism website www.visitbritain.com.

Almost any attraction can take part and the broad theme of a visitor attraction can range from pure fun to high culture and it is looked at within the context of the following general sectors: castles, churches and cathedrals, country parks/estates, farm based attractions, gardens, historic houses, industrial/craft premises, interpretation /visitor centres, monuments, museums and galleries, nature reserves, theme parks, transport, wildlife centres/zoos/safari parks.
British Waterways is encouraging all waterway businesses whose service fits into the category of "attraction" to sign up for the self assessment toolkit and other information which can be found at www.vaqas.org.uk or by contacting VAQAS on 01473 825 633 or at vaqas@eetb.org.uk

QUALITY ASSURED VISITOR ATTRACTION

AND FINALLY...

January's Tourism Business Marketing Meeting, held aboard Barge Crook, covered various subjects important to waterside businesses. John Balmond from Waterscape.com presented the latest research findings showing a picture of consumer motivations such as why they choose certain activities, how they decide what to look for and where and when water is important to them. The findings report ranked water-based activities with the largest potential for new visitors and aligned each activity with the demographic groups most likely to be interested. For a copy of the presentation and all the research findings, please e-mail john.balmond@waterscape.com. Guest presenter Jenny Bidwell from London Zoo showed how creativity, timing and humour can work to great effect to stretch the marketing budget with the 'Ginger Sunday' promotion which delivered the zoo's second busiest day in 2004. The zoo's campaign was a real inspiration for those working to very tight marketing budgets and showed just what can be achieved with a bit of ingenuity.

Rebecca Richardson and Nerissa Bryden of British Waterways London provided updates on their marketing activities including leaflets, distribution, travel trade and consumer campaigns and improvements to priority sites addressing signage, lighting, safety and interpretation at Harlow, Camden, Limehouse Basin, City Mill Lock, Docklands and West London. British Waterways London welcomed the feedback from business operators and as a result have amended the map of

the waterway network in London to be made available from April 2005.

For further information about marketing initiatives and for information about next years meeting please contact nerissa.bryden@britishwaterways.co.uk

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

•Urban Escapes
17-19 June, Waltham Abbey
Get active at the great outdoors show and experience rock climbing, kayaking, canoeing and much more.

•Three Mills Boat Rally
9-10 July, Bromley-by-Bow
Enjoy the brightly painted narrowboats and take part in boat trips, canoeing, craft stalls and children's activities.

If you have an event you'd like to publicise or If your business is holding an event on the towpath or navigation please contact Louise Fishleigh on 020 7985 7234 or louise.fishleigh@britishwaterways.co.uk for an application form.

THEN AND NOW - PADDINGTON BASIN

Constructed 200 years ago, Paddington Basin was opened in 1801 to link the Regent's Canal with the Grand Union. In its heyday, it was surrounded by storage bays, warehouses and light industrial operations. Originally trade here included hay, coal, salt, china, glass, bricks, timber, manure and beer. For many years the basin was hidden from public view, however, today it is undergoing a £300million development which will form the focal point of a new £2billion quarter for the capital.

Paddington Basin during the 1990's

Paddington Basin today

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